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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the changes in power and control relations in the Swedish society as they relate to issues of curriculum theory and research. Two issues in particular are discussed: (1) why Marxist research is still necessary and to what purpose; and (2) some current taks and problems for Marxist research on curriculum and schooling. (SI)

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Marxism, Schooling and Curriculum Theory: revisited.
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Instead of an introduction

In the social, economic and political conjuncture of the late sixties and the early seventies several researchers within the social sciences turned towards Marxism. This was also the case within education.

Within a broadly defined tradition of Marxist theory, critical studies were made that revised views on the history of schooling, the character of schooling within capitalist societies and severely criticized existing curriculum theory and research on teaching. For a while a radical critique of educational matters dominated the scene of educational research. The dominance was never one of numbers. The majority of educational researchers never even attempted to join the "radical left" within the education research community. The term Marxism was soon to be used less and less frequently. Instead "Neo-marxism", "critical", "conflict theory" and other labels were used. Race and gender became issues in their own right and could be discussed without mentioning social class. Marxism itself was considered to be in a state of crisis. It is worthwhile to note that much of the critique of Marxism was performed by writers who identified themselves with Marxism. The development mirrored the changes in the political, economic and social conjuncture. The high hopes of "1968" vanished. Instead of a radical change the Right gained momentum in the seventies and the scenery today in educational research is much more dominated by Reagan and Thatcher than by Karl Marx. At the AERA-meeting last year the chief ideologists of Margaret Thatcher received a large audience and no tomatoes were thrown. Some of us still remember how Arthur R Jensen was received, long, long ago. It is indeed tempting to try to analyze what has happened within educational research during the last 20 years.

Within the theme of this session with its emphasis on "current criticisms" such an endeavor would perhaps be somewhat inappropriate. However, it seems quite impossible to discuss the issues at hand and look ahead without reference to history...

For the last couple of years I have been working on a book concerning changes in power and control relations in the Swedish society and their relation to education and schooling. In this paper I want to raise a few of the issues of that work and try to relate them not so much to Swedish developments but instead to issues of curriculum theory and research. I will briefly develop a number of issues which in my view are problematic. Many of these issues are familiar but still merit our attention.

Why is Marxist research still necessary and to what purpose?

Writing and speaking in the sixties and seventies about education and schooling from a Marxist perspective seemed at one level as an easy task. The "scientistic tradition" dominated the scenery. Educational problems were treated as if they could be reduced to psychological variables and solved by multiple regression analyses and so on. An attack against the narrow paradigm of educational research could be made jointly by Marxists and others not trapped within positivism and logical empiricism. A critical analysis comparing the outcomes of schooling with the ideology of schooling also seemed as a rather straight-forward issue. Again criticism could be voiced from a number of perspectives. Critique of the dominant tradition in educational research was and still is a major task for any serious researcher.

The particular issues of social class, power and hegemony in the capitalist state, the very nature of the capitalist State were however issues that were mainly treated by Marxist researchers alone. The critique was not only scientifically oriented but a part of a social critique as well. In Sweden - at least - we were many times regarded and labelled as "pessimists" since the analysis was not coupled to suggestions on how to change the schools.

However, much writing in a Marxist tradition, was caught up in another tradition of educational research, which by e.g. Gage and Unruh was labelled as description vs improvement.[1] It was and it is strange to read e.g. "Schooling in Capitalist America" and in the final part encounter the heading "Getting There" which rather optimistically addresses the issue of structural change.[2] Writers about schools and schooling from a Marxist perspective seemed in many instances somewhat uncertain about their audience. It is certainly problematic that the primary audience of literature on education and schooling (besides the research community) consists of teachers.[3] On the one hand Marxist research as well as research from other perspectives may well be aimed at the research community itself. On the other hand the Marxist researcher often aims at a general audience (which of course also includes teachers). But if the problematic is the current state of affairs in society and in the schools it is difficult indeed to write as if teachers as teachers could do very much to alter the situation, because of the very simple fact that teachers in our societies do not possess the power to fundamentally alter the schools and even less the power to alter society as such. This does not imply that an educational researcher should not address teachers. It is indeed rather obvious that much work - also from a Marxist point of departure - needs to be done concerning the part played by teachers today. But

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1 N L Gage & W R Unruh (1967). Theoretical formulations for research on teaching. **Review of Educational Research**, 37, 358-370.

2 S Bowles & H Gintis (1976). **Schooling in Capitalist America.** New York: Basic Books. In spite of the last chapter Bowles and Gintis were still labelled pessimists. It is a positive sign, that although critique has been raised against the theses of Bowles and Gintis, their work still remains important and may well be considered as a modern classic. The recent publication of the book **Bowles and Gintis Revisited** (M Cole, editor, 1988. London: Falmer Press) is proof of the power of their arguments.

3 In my opinion the conclusions of e.g. Paul Willis in his work **Learning to Labour** (1977. Westmead: Saxon House) are weakened by his attempts to provide teachers with prescriptions for action. The work by H Giroux (1983): **Theory and Resistance in Education. A Pedagogy for the Opposition.** (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey) is another example of strong theory coupled to extremely weak practice whereby the theoretical arguments are made rather unplausible. The later work by S Aronowitz and H Giroux (1985): **Education under Siege** (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey) is yet another example of an analysis of important issues which somewhere gets blurred by identifying teachers, pupils and parents as the primary audience.

the line between Marxist research on society and schooling on the one hand and teacher practice on the other is not straight. Do at least consider the fact that the growing influence of the Right in society has quite clearly reduced teacher militancy or changed its course from attempts to radicalize teaching (i.e. as part of a political struggle) to attempts to retain existing teacher privileges.[4]

Marxist research is always an intervention in the conjuncture. In education that means to critically observe and comment upon the issues. If such an endeavour was easily recognized in the late sixties and in the early seventies it is perhaps even more important today. The conjuncture in which the earlier critique was presented was favorable.[5] There was a Left audience. Today the audience still exists, but it is more difficult to reach and the opposition is stronger. The necessity to establish independent publishers and research independent of State funds and university grants are high on the agenda. The need to combine research with political action is more urgent than yesterday and the risks are far more obvious today.

Let me add, as a researcher, that I also consider theoretically oriented research important. The advances of the seventies in the areas of e.g. Marxist State theory and class analysis were important but much more work needs to be done in these areas.

It is perhaps necessary to state that Marxism still provides us with the most powerful tradition to perform a critical analysis of the society in which we live and in the area of educational research historical materialism and dialectical materialism, i.e. Marxism is the most powerful "prophylactic" against the pitfalls of subjectivism and idealism. On the other hand it is important to note the need for empirical studies in education within a Marxist framework.[6] The relative lack of such studies is another factor that has contributed to the backward movement of Marxist research in education.

Some current tasks and problems for Marxist research on curriculum and schooling

A major contribution of Marxist educational research has been in the area of

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4 The whole issue of teacher struggle, teacher unions etc is in need of further research, although important contributions have been presented by e.g. W Urban (1982) in his book **Why Teachers Organized** (Detroit: Wayne University Press) and more recently by R V Seifert (1987): **Teacher Militancy. A History of Teacher Strikes 1896-1987.** (Barcombe, Lewes: The Falmer Press) and by M Lawn (1987): **Servants of the State. The Contested Control of Teaching 1900-1930.** (Barcombe, Lewes: The Falmer Press).

5 In retrospect it may be noted that very few of us used our Marxist tools to analyze our political enemies. A number of studies were made concerning the schooling of working-class children etc. The fact that middle class and upper class children fared very well was rather neglected. What were and are the characteristics of schooling the elite in capitalist society? What are the characteristics of conservative politics concerning schooling? It is only recently that such studies are being undertaken (e.g. L Lundahl, 1989: **In the Name of Christian Morality, Productivity and Sound Reason. The Education Policy of the Swedish Conservative Party 1904-1962.** Lund, Sweden: Pedagogiska institutionen, Lunds universitet. In Swedish.)

6 For Marxist research in general the argument for empirical research has been forcefully argued by e.g. E O Wright (1978) in his book **Class, Crisis and the State** (London: NLB). One might note that even that issue was somewhat obscured in educational research by a dispute over methods. There is no such thing as a Marxist method of data gathering and, it may well be argued that the issue of methods is a secondary within a Marxist tradition (cf D Kallós, 1981: The Study of Schooling: What is Studied? Why? And How? In T S Popkewitz and B R Tabachnick, editors: **The Study of Schooling**. New York: Praeger, 31-68).

educational reform and the effects of such reform. More recently research into specific school subjects, their development and change have been added to our knowledge of school and school reform.

In my own work I have become more and more intrigued by some of the theoretical implications of such work. The whole issue of the relations between society and schooling has once again emerged in the focus. Research - and first and foremost Marxist research or Marxist oriented research - has traced the antecedents of the school system of today and carefully explored the contradictions behind mass schooling. It has also noted and analyzed the emergence of an educational Monopoly - the School. It has well established the contradictory role of State schooling in reproduction and transmission of ideology, especially in regard to working class children, minority groups and more recently in relation to gender. The fields of curriculum history, curriculum theory and curriculum evaluation has been greatly and positively affected by such research.

The problematic which emerges has to do with the fact that once the school as we know it was established it can no longer be understood only in terms of its antecedents. Or to put it in another way: When the school exists it begins to live its own life. On the one hand many of the characteristics of schools, curriculum and teaching seem very stable over time. But do these characteristics have the same meaning today as they had when they were established?

If we analyze the changes that have taken place within State schooling within the capitalist societies a number of apparent paradoxes emerge. Let me give but a few examples. In late 19th century and in the early decades of the 20th century a number of new subjects were introduced in the common school in Sweden. Such subjects included handicraft, home economics etc. They were introduced beacuse of the fact that the homes no longer provided the working class children with such skills that were regarded as necessary in order to ensure social stability and in the cases mentioned especially to domesticate working class girls.[7] The subjects in many cases still exist but the reasons for their introduction no longer prevail. In fact it is very hard to understand why a subject like handicraft still exists in the schools in very much the same way as when the subject was introduced. The organization of the school year, the school day and the school hour can be traced historically and the reasons behind this arrangement can be explained. The fact that schools are organized in the same way a hundred years later is, however, not easy to explain. The problem may be stated theoretically in the following way: At the level of appearance much seems unchanged but the underlying social reality producing the appearances has changed.

I think that it is necessary today once more to analyze critically the whole idea of State compulsory schooling, the school subjects and the role of the teacher in connection to the changing relations between home, work and school. I am convinced that such an analysis can be successfully undertaken only from a Marxist point of departure.

A few further examples taht have emerged in my own analyses may be mentioned. What do e.g. recent trends towards a "professionalization" of teachers signify? It implies to me first and foremost that a subordination in the student-teacher relationship once upheld by exercise of power and control measures is to be substituted by a "legitimate" subordination via expertise. What is needed

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7 Cf U Johansson (1987). **Schooling for the Home. Gardening, Handicraft, Domestic Science and Temperance Instruction in Swedish Elementary School 1842-1919.** In Swedish. Umeå, Sweden: Umeå University.

in such a perspective is rather a "professionalization" of the students. And due to the fact that schools are as they are I think it would be very illuminating to study empirically the changing relations between students and teachers in terms of class. It might be added that recent trends in Western Europe towards a privatization of schools can be studied in such a perspective as well. To state the issue provocatively: In private schools the professional teacher is a wage-labourer in service of those who can afford the services and who want them. In State financed compulsory schools the professional teacher functions more as an expert in benevolent domination for those who are forced to be there. Recent trends in the change of teacher education should also be carefully analyzed bearing in mind the problems mentioned here.

In fact the whole idea of compulsory schooling must be criticallt analyzed, not only as it is done from a conservative perspective where it is noted that such a system is costly and inefficient but from a perspective of the Left. Is compulsory State schooling compatible with a move towards real democracy? Can the interests of the working class really dominate within a monopolized State controlled compulsory school? Another question in line with what I have stated above may be mentioned. Marxist research in education has demonstrated that behind an ideology that stated that schooling and educational reforms aimed at reducing segregation and inequality in reality a policy was pursued that increased inequality or at least did not really change the situation. The reform movement during this century has aimed at changing this situation. Marxist analyses have contributed in exploring different solutions to this issue and provided various possible solutions. These solutions were never implemented or failed. It would perhaps be fruitful to analyze this issue more directly by looking at the whole issue of educational reform during the 20th century primarily as steps towards increasing inequality. In such a perspective educational reform has been quite successful. Indeed, in England it seems like such a policy is now pursued quite openly as a result of changing power relations.

Instead of a conclusion

Recent developments in USA, England and Sweden imply changes in the loci of power and control over schools. Such changes have been studied also from a Marxist perspective but still much work needs to be done. In a time when differences in income, work conditions etc increase it is increasingly important to focus upon the different objective interests of different classes and strata in society and how these different interests act upon the very same reality -the schools.

At present the debate on schooling is dominated by the Right. The Left is at best reactive. The Right has been successful in implementing a policy from which the bourgeoisie and large segments of the middle classes benefit. That policy has been formulated as a policy in the best interests of all, e g to save a "Nation at Risk". The Left has in most instances formulated a counter policy that would benefit the poor and oppressed at the cost of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes. Even in the late sixties and early seventies the Left had great difficulties in producing a credible vision of a New Society and a new educational system. The Left in the capitalist countries has rarely produced hegemonic statements.

What needs to be done? While it is still necessary to react to the proposals and the implemented policy from the Right it is more and more urgent that the Left produces its own vision. Sadly enough the majority of Marxist educational researchers have hitherto played an insignificant part in a process towards that goal.